

Design for a reading comprehension experiment

-Sugata Mitra, 8 April 2012

This experiment studies if collaborative self organization can improve reading comprehension.

In order to conduct this experiment properly, you should use children who can read at, approximately, the UK Key Stage 1 level. In the experiment, they will be exposed to material at the UK Key Stage 3 level.

If you work with children who are learning English as a second language you can still use the same material, perhaps with an older age group.

If you work with children who are learning another language and not English, then you will need to translate the tests, or, easier, find similar level material in the language you want to use. But you will need to show that the material you are using does indeed match the UK Key Stage 3 level.

I have used a group size of 24 as an example. If you have more or less children please scale accordingly.

Resources required:

1. 16-24 children of ages between 10-15 years.
2. One internet connection for every eight children, approximately.
3. Materials from folders Step1, 2 and 3, 4 and 5, and Step 6.
4. A printer, preferably color.

Procedure:

Step 1 (Day 1, 90 minutes)

1. Give each child a copy of the Step 1 reading test and ask them to answer in one hour. Explain to them that this is an experiment and it doesn't matter at all if they cannot answer even one question.
2. Collect and score the answers for each child and enter in the spreadsheet given. This is an excel spreadsheet called "Reading Comprehension Data Capture Sheet".
3. Store all test papers and put away.
4. Thank the children for trying. Tell them the next step will be a bit like a game.



Step 1 looks like the picture above.

Step 2 (Day 2, 90 minutes)

1. Divide the children into two halves at random or as they wish.
2. Give half of the children one copy of the Step 2 reading test A and ask them to answer this in one hour. They are not allowed to talk or use a computer.
3. Ask the other half of the children to form groups of 4. Approximate groups size will do. No group should be less than 3 or more than 5 children. Each group can use one computer connected to the Internet.
4. Give each group one copy of Step 2 reading test B and ask them to answer this as a group in one hour.
5. They are allowed to talk and use computers. They are allowed to walk around and see what other groups are doing. They can change their group and join another one if they wish. They should not disturb the other half of the class who are working alone.
6. The children should select one child to be their supervisor. This child will maintain law and order and help the others with any difficulties. Adults present should not talk or interact with the children in any way. (unless, of course, there is an emergency. Tell the children, if they fight or harm each other, we cannot continue our very important experiment).
7. Collect and score all test sheets, noting carefully whether they are from group or individual work.
8. Fill the data into the spreadsheet.



Step 2 would look like this.

Step 3 (Day 3, 90 minutes)

1. Divide the children into the same halves as in Step 2.
2. The half that worked alone in Step 2 will now work in groups. The half that worked in groups in Step 2 will now work alone.
3. Give the 'work alone' half of the children one copy of the Step 2 reading test B and ask them to answer this in one hour. They are not allowed to talk or use a computer.
4. Ask the other half of the children to form groups of 4. Approximate groups size will do. No group should be less than 3 or more than 5 children. Each group can use one computer connected to the Internet.
5. Give each group one copy of Step 2 reading test A and ask them to answer this as a group in one hour.
6. They are allowed to talk and use computers. They are allowed to walk around and see what other groups are doing. They should not disturb the other half of the class who are working alone.
7. The children should select one child to be their supervisor. This child will maintain law and order and help the others with any difficulties. Adults present should not talk or interact with the children in any way. (unless, of course, there is an emergency. Tell the children, if they fight or harm each other, we cannot continue our very important experiment).
8. Collect and score all test sheets, noting carefully whether they are from group or individual work. Fill the data into the spreadsheet.

So now, reading tests A and B have been done by all the children individually and in groups.



Step 3 will look like this.

Step 4 (Day 4, 90 minutes) and Step 5 (Day 5, 90 minutes)

Simply repeat Steps 2 and 3 with reading tests C and D. The two halves of the class and the groups DO NOT have to be the same. Tell the children to decide. The supervisor should also be different for all steps.

Step 6 (Day 6, 90 minutes)

Simply repeat Step 1 with the reading test in Step 6 which is actually just the same as in Step 1.

Complete the spreadsheet and return to me.

Thank you!